



38 – 44½ ALBERT STREET

BUSINESS BLOCK

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee
December 2005

38 – 44½ ALBERT STREET – BUSINESS BLOCK

Winnipeg in the early 1890s was, although few realized it, on the verge of a spectacular era of growth and development that would take the small retail centre and place it on the world stage – at the very heart of the greatest period of immigration ever seen. The changes to the western prairies were dramatic, no less so in the region's premier city – Winnipeg. And as Winnipeg's built environment evolved to serve this new economic role and its new population, specific districts that had been established a decade earlier provided the basic pattern for this frenzied period of growth.

The real estate boom of the early 1880s was intimately connected to the early construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), Canada's first transcontinental railway, west of Winnipeg. Land prices in the small capital city skyrocketed, the population soared and solid brick structures began replacing the small wooden shacks that dotted the mud streets and avenues. It was also the beginning of the segregation of the various sectors of the city – residential, commercial and industrial – and their specific buildings.¹ The huge advance in land prices was especially noticeable along Main Street north of Portage Avenue. Here the small residential properties were consolidated into larger blocks of land and replaced by increasingly massive commercial structures (Plates 1-5).

Commercial interests, both local and from Eastern Canada, were quick to locate in this area. The city rapidly assumed the role of wholesale hub for all of Western Canada. Companies like R.J. Whitla, Stobart, Eden and Company, George D. Wood and J.H. Ashdown were all organized and carrying on business prior to the CPR boom.² With this development came a maturation of the retail and wholesale sectors. The bust of 1882 did not end this development, but rather strengthened it by removing the excess and inexperienced entrepreneurs, by reducing the surplus

¹ R.R. Rostecki, "The Growth of Winnipeg, 1870-1886," unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Manitoba, 1980, pp. 112-14.

² Manitoba Free Press, September 3, 1904, p. 14.

stock and by hardening attitudes towards credit.³ The area, however, was undeniably developing as the warehouse district, slowly through the 1880s and 1890s and then rapidly after 1900.

The building under study was part of the pre-warehouse history of Winnipeg, when the area north of what we know today as Portage Avenue filled with small frame homes. The structure is actually comprised of several buildings, the oldest completed shortly after the incorporation of the City of Winnipeg, its role as a boarding house and rental property lasted for several decades before the interior was converted into offices retail space. Retail space, in the form of a one-storey addition to the front and south side of the original building, has been occupied by a wide variety of businesses, restaurants and other small-scale ventures since its construction in 1924.

STYLE

No pictures of the original building have been uncovered and too little of the original exterior remains to make a precise determination as to the original style. Plans do, however, show that the building did not have a front porch, as many residential structures of that period would have boasted, but did have a bay window at the south end of the front (east) façade (Plate 6).

It may have been that the structure was modestly ornamented in the Queen Anne style, similar to the Kelly House on Adelaide Street (Plate 7) that was built five years later. There is no evidence in any of the present documentation or on the building itself to suggest a more ornamented version of the style such as the Bernard House, 454 Edmonton Street (Plate 8), built in 1903.

The business section of this facility is an example of the unadorned one-part commercial block style that could be seen on a vast number of structures in every part of the city. Developed in the mid-19th century, this urban-oriented style was attractive to speculators because it inexpensive to build – small in scale and modestly finished.⁴

³ R.R. Rostecki, op. cit., p. 113.

⁴ Richard Longstreth, The Buildings of Main Street (Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1987), pp. 54-55.

Speculators often used the one-part block to occupy space that would eventually hold a larger building. In this way, the small blocks represented a land claim “staked on urban ground.”⁵

Ornamentation on many of these soon-to-be-replaced structures was understandably minimized, although their finishes, organization and uses varied considerably. Some ran for an entire block and offered a unified visage, while others borrowed elements from the latest in design and others still were simply unadorned boxes. The over-riding feature of all types was their one-storey height.⁶

If the retail blocks were not replaced over time by larger structures, as often happened, many of the buildings were renovated to ‘modernize’ their appearances, as was the case with this block.

CONSTRUCTION

The residential portion of this structure is of brick veneer construction, two storeys in height and measuring approximately 6.25 x 8.85 metres (20½ x 29 feet), see Appendix I.⁷ Its date of construction is difficult to determine precisely. The present legal description of the land on which it sits is 5 St. John, Plan 13, Lot 8 and part of Lot 7. In other words, the house sits on land within River Lot 5 St. John, in what was originally referred to as the Alexander Morris Estate. That part of 5 St. John found between Portage Avenue, Isabel Street, and Notre Dame and McDermot avenues was originally subdivided into Plan 13 on December 31, 1872 and registered the following spring.

Careful examination of City of Winnipeg Assessment Roll information for the pre-1880 era in this area is difficult because of the unorganized state of the records. It appears, however, that in 1874 Lot 7 of the Morris Estate was vacant, the land owned by cabinetmaker Joseph C. Bishop. A year later, another cabinetmaker, Henry T. Shelton, owned the vacant lot. Shelton and Bishop were business partners whose company, which began in 1872 and lasted approximately 12 years,

⁵ Ibid., p. 55.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 54-67.

⁷ City of Winnipeg Assessment Records, Roll 600200, Ward 2, PC 27 (below as AR).

expanded into a retail operation selling furniture, carpets and other goods.⁸

By 1878, a house had been built on the land, owned (but not lived in) by John O. Le Cappellain.⁹ If we conclude that this house was built in ca.1878, it would constitute one of the city's oldest standing brick veneer structures.

The retail block built around the home was completed in 1924 at a cost of \$7,000.¹⁰ Several changes subsequently have been made to the one-storey, solid brick structure. Neither the method of construction nor the materials used is rare or unique.

DESIGN

As mentioned previously, the exterior design of the ca.1877 house are unknown at this time, although the brick veneer structure does exhibit brick drip moulding above second storey windows (Plate 9).

When built in 1924, the new one-storey retail section was divided into four retail shops, each accessed through a recessed door (Plates 10 and 11). These entrances were likely similar to those found on the Phoenix Block, 388 Donald Street (Plate 12). The entire block was clad, as described in the Architect's plans, in "pressed brick." The large metal-framed display windows were topped by a metal-lined belt course, the northern-most store had a pair of windows, the remaining shops single openings. A metal-capped brick parapet finished what was an attractive block.

In 1952, the two southern-most shops, #38 and #40, were combined into one space and the recessed entrance was replaced by a door flush to the main façade (Plates 13 and 14). At this time, according to City of Winnipeg records, the original brick was covered in vitrolite,¹¹ a glass tile used

⁸ Thanks to Debbie Lyon for information.

⁹ City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls (below as ARo), 1874-1878.

¹⁰ City of Winnipeg Building Permit (below as BP), #1650/1924.

¹¹ City of Winnipeg Assessment Record, Roll No. 600200-12-2, PC 98.

extensively to ‘modernize’ old buildings throughout North America beginning in the 1920s (Plate 15). Two years later, the front of #42-44 Albert Street was altered, the doorways were made flush and the block was covered in “Roman tile” (Plate 14).¹² This gave the façade an unmatched appearance.

The original rear of the retail space featured a number of windows and three doors (Plate 16). These openings are still present (Plate 17).

At present, the front (east) façade of the block continues to be unmatched (Plate 18). The southern section has seen the removal of the 1952 vitrolite cladding, uncovering dark brick that likely dates to its original construction (Plate 19). The northern section has been painted but the 1954 cladding is still intact (Plate 20).

Both the north and south side walls of the retail space have been stuccoed as has the rear elevation (Plates 21 and 22).

INTERIOR

For many years, a Chinese restaurant has occupied 38 Albert Street and includes kitchen and storage space at the rear (Plate 23) and a dining room in the front (Plate 24). The two retail suites to the north, 42 and 44 Albert Street have been renovated as tenancy has changed over time (Plates 25 and 26). The residential space at #44½ Albert Street has also been altered over the years, no evidence of original materials or finishes was found (Plates 27 and 28). The ground floor has been converted to part of the retail space at 44 Albert Street, the second floor space is accessed by an interior staircase on the building’s north side.

¹² Ibid.

INTEGRITY

The building occupies its original location and appears to be in fair structural condition. As outlined above, the house and the retail space have both been severely altered over the years, both in terms of layout and interior and exterior finishes.

STREETSCAPE

Much has changed in the area since the two-storey home was built. Plate 1 gives a remarkable glimpse of the area ca.1881, looking west down McDermot Avenue from Main Street. In the foreground we see a large warehouse, the harbinger of things to come. Behind it is the expanding residential district that within only a few decades would nearly vanish in the face of the expanding warehouse district. Although the house that is now 44½ Albert Street is not pictured in Plate 1, the photograph indicates the type of neighbourhood in which the premises were located until after the turn of the century.

Plate 2, taken approximately 30 years later, shows the monumental transformation of the area. While the tops of a few houses can be seen, large brick warehouses and business blocks take up much of the area. The three-storey brick building in the foreground effectively blocks sight of the brick veneer house on Albert Street.

Today, this small business block is dwarfed by the large office buildings, hotels and warehouses that line Albert Street and the nearby streets (Plate 29).

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTOR

The contractor of the original house was J.J. Johnston, a local builder of whom nothing is known at this time. The newer commercial block was designed and built by the local contractor William A. Irish. Irish formed a partnership with John A. Saul, who had operated a successful contracting company with his brother David beginning in the early 1880s. The Saul Brothers were responsible for the construction of the Benson and Bawlf Blocks, 146 and 150 Princess Street respectively, in

1882. In the lean years after the real estate boom in 1882, the brothers moved to rural Manitoba where they designed and built many prominent local structures.¹³ Back in Winnipeg, the company built the Bate Building, 221 McDermot Avenue (1883, Grade II) and the G.F. & J. Galt warehouse, 103 Princess Street in 1887. Just before the turn of the century Saul and Irish was formed, beginning a partnership that lasted into the 1910s. Following the lead of other contracting companies, the company built numerous houses throughout the city that were then sold or used as rental properties. Major works completed by the company include the J.H. Ashdown Warehouse, 167 Bannatyne Avenue (1902), St. Stephen's Presbyterian Church (now Elim Chapel), 546 Portage Avenue (1902-03), the Silvester-Willson Building, 222 McDermot Avenue (1904), La Vérendrye School, 290 Lilac Street (1909), Westminster United Church, 745 Westminster Avenue (1909, Grade II) and Dingwall Building, 62 Albert Street (1910, Grade III). Fire halls No. 4, 470 Gertrude Street (1904, demolished), No. 5, 354 Sherbrook Street (1904), No. 6, 66 Pearl Street (1904, demolished), and No. 7, 349 Burrows Avenue (1904) were all built by the firm in partnership with S.B. Ritchie.¹⁴

During the year of the partnership, John Saul was also listed as the lone contractor on a number of other fire halls in the city – No. 8, 325 Talbot Street, (1906, Grade III), No. 10, 825 Sargent Avenue (1910) and No. 11, 180 Sinclair Street (1910, demolished) – as well as Luxton School, 111 Polson Avenue (1908) and the first St. John's High School, Salter Street at Church Avenue (1910, demolished) for Winnipeg School Division No. 1.

The partnership appears to have ended in 1912. After 1913, John Saul's name appears infrequently while W.A. Irish continued to get contracts into the late 1920s.¹⁵

¹³ S.C. Grover, "87 King Street & 88 Arthur Street, Anne Building and Arthur Building (Blue Ribbon Building)," report for the City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee, February 1983, p. 1.

¹⁴ David Spector "The Architecture of Functionality: Winnipeg Fire Halls, Hydro Terminals and Sub-stations, Pumping Stations and Police Station to 1925" report prepared for the Historical Buildings Committee, City of Winnipeg, September 1981 p. 53-54.

¹⁵ City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books, 1899-1926.

PERSON/INSTITUTION

John O. Le Cappellain, the original owner of the house on Albert Street, was a long-time employee of the Ashdown Hardware Company. Le Cappellain is listed in the local directories as a salesman (1876-77) and as the store's chief clerk from 1878-81. He is also identified as the owner of a wholesale/retail hardware business on Main Street (Plate 30) in 1877-78 and subsequently as a City Alderman (1881) and a broker (1882). By 1887, Le Cappellain disappears from local directories and his whereabouts and activities are unknown.

The house, then numbered 8 Albert Street, became the property of the Manitoba and North West Loan Company, with tenants W.B. Cheyne, groom, James Monington, carpenter, and John Blott, farmer. In 1900, the tenant was flour and feed dealer Stewart Boyd.¹⁶ In 1905, the house was renumbered as 44 Albert Street and owned, along with another house at 40 Albert, by R.H. Moody, agent. The tenant of #44 was a tailor, W.D. Clark. The Henderson's Directory also lists a weekly French language paper, *L'Echo de Manitoba*, as publishing out of the building during 1905.

From this point until the 1924 addition, the house was used as commercial property, home to a messenger company and a tailor. When the addition was completed, it was occupied by Jimy's Barber Shop, tailor W.H. Drinkwater, Wymie Wiseman's watch shop, and J. and J. Taylor, safe works. The residence was rented to a clerk, Ernest Mellott.¹⁷ The building was owned by a United States company from 1929-51, and then by local entrepreneurs from 1952 to the present. Tenants of the retail block have been many and varied.¹⁸

EVENT

There is no known significant event connected with this structure.

¹⁶ ARo, 1874-1900.

¹⁷ Henderson's Directory, 1928.

¹⁸ ARo, 1920-present.

CONTEXT

Because of the unusual construction history of this building, it fits into two separate stages of Winnipeg's development. The ca.1878 house was part of the city's early urbanization. Built prior to the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) boom of the early 1880s, this house was among many situated close to Main Street, then undeniably Winnipeg's most important thoroughfare. These early residential neighbourhoods lacked the segregation of income groups witnessed after the boom.

With the construction of the railway came the separation of residential property into "desirable" and "undesirable" areas, with many middle-income owners choosing sites north of Princess Street.¹⁹ Much of the early housing to the south began to be displaced by another consequence of the railways, the warehouse. This house on Albert Street, therefore, found itself surrounded by the occupants of the warehouse district including hotels and office buildings.

Redevelopment of the area eventually led the structure to its own transformation. By 1905, the residential role of the building had been replaced and, when the structure was further altered for commercial purposes two decades later, it was the inevitable conclusion to a process that had begun with the building of the CPR.

LANDMARK

This small facility stands hidden among the larger, more visually striking buildings of the area. It is only through the limited activity generated by its businesses that this structure garners public contact or recognition.

¹⁹ R.R. Rostecki, "The Growth of Winnipeg, 1870-1886." Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, 1980, p. 102.



APPENDIX I

CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report

Building Address: 38 Albert Street (42-44½ Albert)

Building Name: Business Block

Original Use: multi-tenant residence & offices

Current Use: restaurant & commercial

Roll No. (Old): 600200 (9691)

R.S.N.: 146688 & 146689

Municipality: 12

Ward: 2

Property or Occupancy Code: 98

Legal Description: 5/6 St. John, Plan 33006, Lots 15/16 (Original: 5 St. John, Plan 13, part Lot 7: Lot 8)

Location: west side between Notre Dame and McDermot avenues

Date of Construction: 1877/1924

Storeys: 1 & 2

Construction Type: various

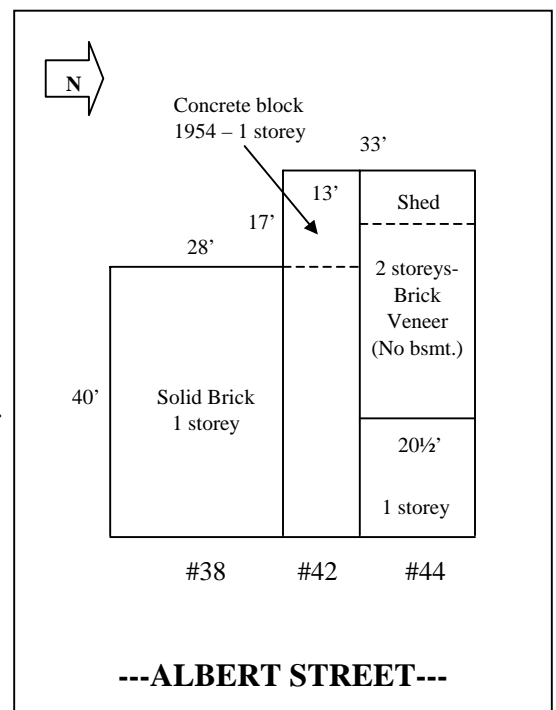
HERITAGE STATUS: ON INVENTORY

Building Permits (Plans available: [A] Archives; [M] Microfilm; [V] Vault):

- 1650/1924 [A] \$7,000 (original); 738/1952 [A] \$2,500 (interior/exterior alteration); 5254/1954 \$1,000 (repairs to store); 7596/1954 \$2,000 (store front alteration); 3348/1963 \$500 (interior alteration – Beauty Salon); 3686/1991 \$2,000 (fire repairs to interior); 3895/1991 \$4,000 (tenant improvements)

Information:

- $40\frac{1}{2} \times 40 \times 14\frac{1}{2} = 46,972$ cu. ft.
- #38 – Front faced with vitrolite – balance stucco
- #42-44 – Front faced with Roman Tile/brick veneer, balance stucco
- Permit 738/1952 – Wall between #38 & 40 torn down – replaced by beams and posts. Front of building rebuilt – new doors and windows, vitrolite front, and restaurant fixtures
- Permit 5254/1954 – repairs to 2nd storey suite
- Permit 7596/1954 – Roman tile front on #42-44, and repairs to concrete block building
- 1962 Assessment – Building “good condition”, residence only fair
- 1990 – 3 shops previously heated by steam, now electric
- 1995 – Building in very poor condition – application to Zoning Department to demolish



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Plate 1 – McDermot Avenue looking west from Main Street, ca.1881. (Photo courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, "Winnipeg- Streets- McDermot #1".)



Plate 2 – The same view approximately two decades later (ca.1903). Large brick and stone warehouses and retail/office buildings have replaced all the residential property in this shot. (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba.)

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Plate 3 – Main Street looking north and west from Lombard Avenue, 1876. (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba, N21074.)



Plate 4 – Looking south and east from Main Street just west of Bannatyne Avenue, 1874. (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba, N20723.)

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Plate 5 – Looking south and east from the corner of McDermot Avenue and Albert Street, ca.1882. While large brick blocks have been constructed on Main Street, the land to the east is still mostly residential in nature. (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba, N11877.)

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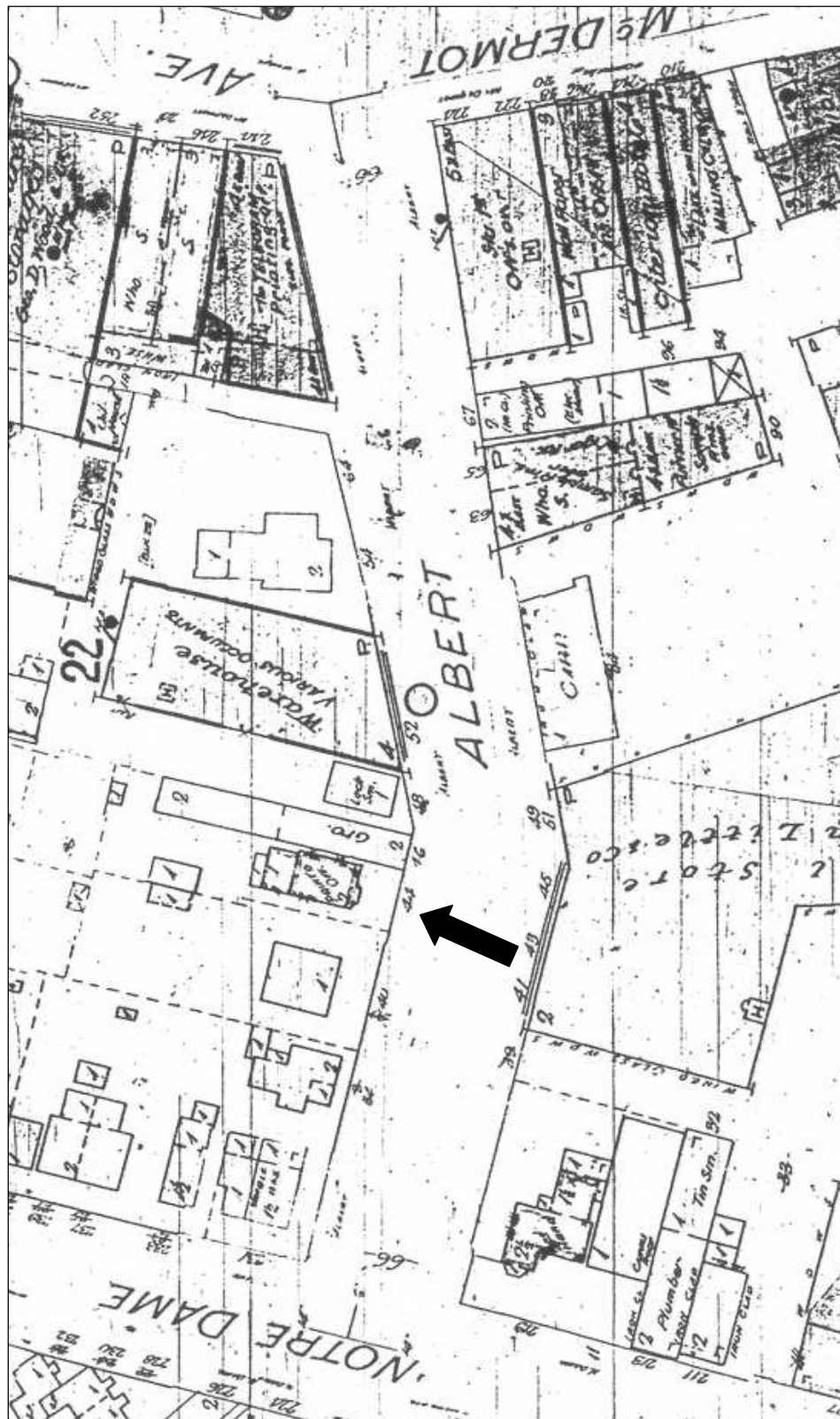


Plate 6 – Section of City of Winnipeg Fire Atlas, 1895 (revised to 1905), showing Albert Street from Notre Dame Avenue to McDermot Avenue. The house, numbered 44 Albert Street, is at the arrow. (Reproduced with the permission of the Insurers' Advisory Organization Inc. who are copyright holders of these plans.)

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Plate 7 – Kelly House, 88 Adelaide Street, built 1882. (City of Winnipeg Planning Department, 1979.)



Plate 8 – Bernard House, 454 Edmonton Street, built 1903. (M. Peterson, 2003.)

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Plate 9 – Detail of house, 44½ Albert Street, 2005. (M. Peterson, 2005.)

Architectural drawing of the front elevation of a building. The drawing shows a two-story structure with a central entrance and several windows. The text "FRONT ELEVATION" is written vertically on the right side. Handwritten notes include "Painted" and "Wood" near the windows, and "Plaster" near the entrance. The drawing is oriented horizontally on the page.

Plate 10 – Architect’s plans, #1650/1924, “Front Elevaiton.” (Courtesy of City Archives.)

Architectural floor plan of a building, showing a long central corridor with various rooms and structural details. The plan includes dimensions, room names like 'Kitchen', 'Bath', and 'Bedroom', and a title 'FLOOR PLAN'.

Key features and labels on the plan:

- Rooms and Areas:** Kitchen, Bath, Bedroom, Living Room, Dining Room, Hall, Stairs, and a large central corridor.
- Dimensions:** Various measurements are provided throughout the plan, such as 10'-0", 12'-0", 14'-0", 16'-0", 18'-0", 20'-0", 22'-0", 24'-0", 26'-0", 28'-0", 30'-0", 32'-0", 34'-0", 36'-0", 38'-0", 40'-0", 42'-0", 44'-0", 46'-0", 48'-0", 50'-0", 52'-0", 54'-0", 56'-0", 58'-0", 60'-0", 62'-0", 64'-0", 66'-0", 68'-0", 70'-0", 72'-0", 74'-0", 76'-0", 78'-0", 80'-0", 82'-0", 84'-0", 86'-0", 88'-0", 90'-0", 92'-0", 94'-0", 96'-0", 98'-0", 100'-0".
- Structural Details:** The plan shows walls, doors, windows, and structural elements like columns and beams.
- Annotations:** Various notes and labels are present, including 'Kitchen', 'Bath', 'Bedroom', 'Living Room', 'Dining Room', 'Hall', 'Stairs', 'FLOOR PLAN', and 'Scale 1/4" = 1'-0"'. There are also handwritten notes like 'S. Charles Hotel' and 'Drafting Office'.

Plate 11 – Architect’s plans, #1650/1924, “Floor Plan.” (Courtesy of City Archives.)

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Plate 12 – Original entrance, Phoenix Block, 388 Donald Street, 2005; built 1910, architect G.W. Northwood, contractor Thomas Kelly and Sons Ltd. (M. Peterson, 2005.)

38-44½ ALBERT STREET – BUSINESS BLOCK

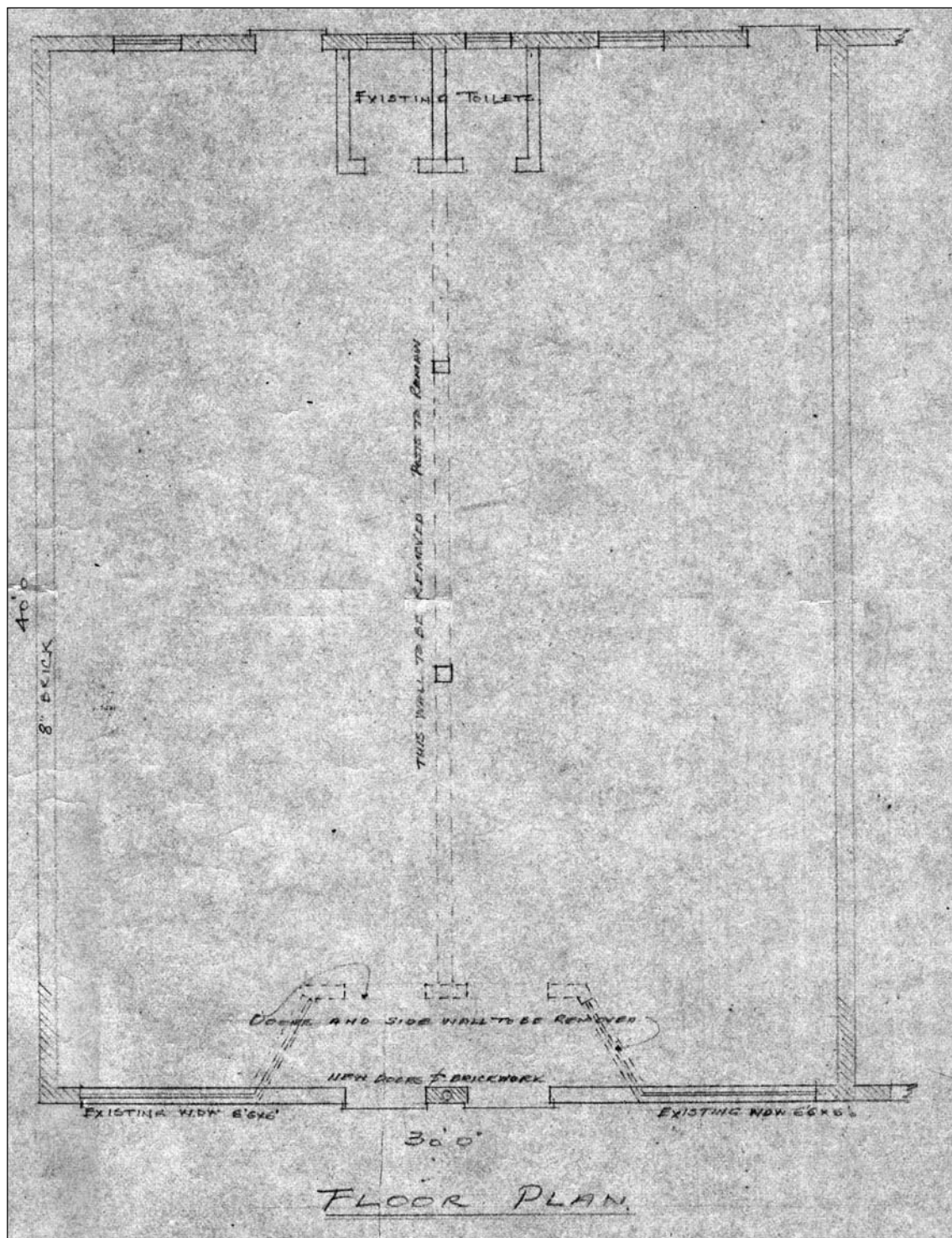


Plate 13 – Architect's plans, #738/1952, "Floor Plan." (Courtesy of City Archives.)

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Plate 14 – 38 Albert Street, 1978. Note the altered entrance and cladding over the original brick exterior and the altered entrance of 42 Albert Street at the right side of the photograph.
(City of Winnipeg Planning Department.)



Plate 15 – 38-44½ Albert Street, 1994. The 1952-era vitrolite cladding is still present on 38 Albert Street. (M. Peterson, 1994.)

38-44½ ALBERT STREET – BUSINESS BLOCK

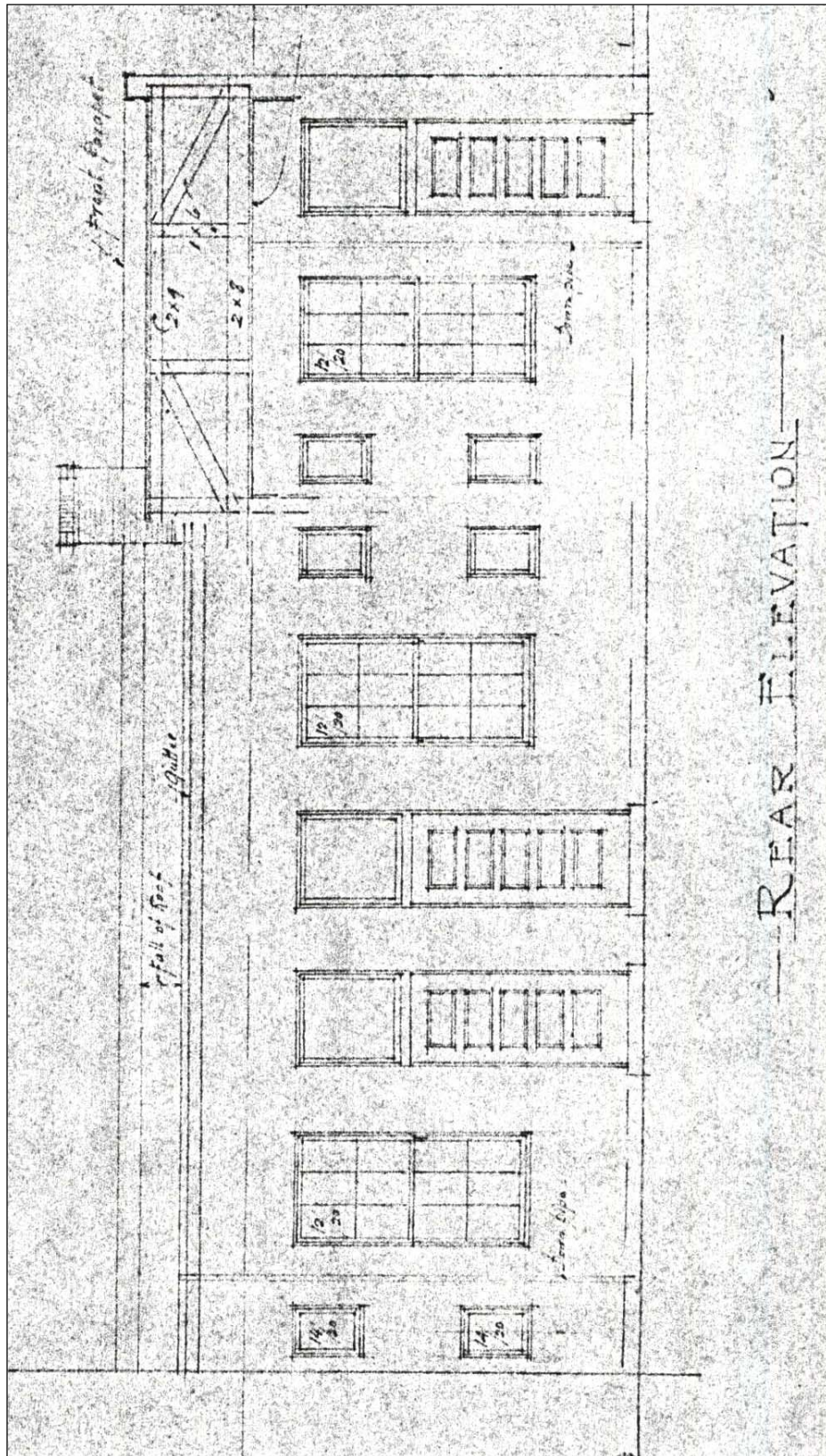


Plate 16 – Architect's plans, #1650/1924, "Rear Elevation." (Courtesy of City Archives.)

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Plate 17 – 38 Albert Street, rear (west) façade, 2005. (M. Peterson, 2005.)



Plate 18 – 38-44½ Albert Street, east façade, looking north, 2005. (M. Peterson, 2005.)

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Plate 19 – 38 Albert Street, front (east) façade, 2005. (M. Peterson, 2005.)



Plate 20 – 42-44 Albert Street, front (east) façade, 2005. (M. Peterson, 2005.)

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Plate 21 – 38-44 Albert Street, north façade, 2005. (M. Peterson, 2005.)



Plate 22 – 38-44 Albert Street, rear (west) façade, 2005. (M. Peterson, 2005.)

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Plate 23 – 38 Albert Street, kitchen area, 2005. (M. Peterson, 2005.)



Plate 24 – 38 Albert Street, dining room area, 2005. (M. Peterson, 2005.)

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Plate 25 – 42 Albert Street, retail space, 2005. (M. Peterson, 2005.)



Plate 26 – 44 Albert Street, retail space, 2005. (M. Peterson, 2005.)

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Plate 27 – 44½ Albert Street, kitchen (left) and bedroom (right) space, 2005. (M. Peterson, 2005.)



Plate 28 – 44½ Albert Street, hallway and bathroom, 2005. (M. Peterson, 2005.)

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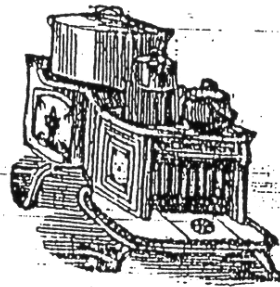


Plate 29 – Albert Street looking south, 2005. (M. Peterson, 2005.)

LE CAPPELLAIN & CO.,

Wholesale and Retail

DEALERS IN



HARDWARE,
STOVES,

TINWARE.

Gas Fitting in all its branches.

Agricultural Implements, &c., &c.

McKENNEY'S BLOCK,

MAIN STREET, WINNIPEG.